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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000934

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TAGS: PINR ASEC CASC PREL RP

SUBJECT: SUBJECT: A/S HILL MEETS WITH GRP OFFICIALS ON
CURRENT SITUATION

REF: MANILA 918 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Paul W. Jones for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a February 28 meeting with A/S Hill, Charge Jones, and DAS John, Philippine Defense Secretary Cruz, National Security Advisor Gonzales, and National Intelligence Coordinating Agency Director Garcia said there were three distinct elements to the government's response to threats to stability. Military coup plotters would eventually be court-martialed and jailed, contrary to recent history of rehabilitating them to avoid dissension within the military. Longer term plots by leftist politicians, believed to be Communist Party members colluding with the New People's Army, would be addressed by filing rebellion charges with judicial authorities; some 120 such cases (in preparation over the past four months) were filed on February 27, including against six members of Congress. The Declaration of Emergency was distinct from these responses and only empowered the government to prevent plotters from abusing the media or public utilities in their attempts to overthrow the government. Cruz and Gonzales predicted that the Declaration of Emergency would be lifted in one to four weeks. A/S Hill pressed them to lift the Declaration of Emergency quickly, noting that the raid on a small newspaper could raise questions about the government's commitment to freedom of the media. End Summary.

Coup Threats and the Marines

¶2. (C) Defense Secretary Cruz said that coup threats appear to have diminished markedly after the Marines accepted the removal of their leadership in a standoff on February 26. The government intends to deal with seditious soldiers using the Military Code of Justice, eventually court-martialing and jailing alleged instigators General Lim and Colonel Querubin.

For too long in the Philippines, they said, coup plotters were rehabilitated to avoid divisions in the armed forces. They accused Army Ranger General Lim of being in direct contact with former President Estrada on plans to overthrow the government, whereas Colonel Querubin was simply out "for his own Messianic ends." They noted that Colonel Querubin and General Lim were both leaders of the bloody coup of 1989 against the government of President Aquino.

Arrests Made Against the Communist Party

13. (C) Cruz and Gonzales said that the government had decided some four months ago to develop judicial cases against persons suspected of rebellion. Cases were almost ready for submission to judicial authorities when the attempted coup of February 24 was uncovered. The first charges were brought February 27 against at least 50 individuals, including six Members of Congress. The six legislators are under the temporary custody of the House of Representatives, while others named in the cases have gone underground, they said. All members of the secret Central Committee of the Communist Party would be charged and arrested, they said.

14. (C) From now on, they continued, every new attack by the New People's Army (NPA) -- the military wing of the Communist Party -- would be added to the list of charges against the members of the Central Committee. They underscored that the U.S. and the EU had designated both the CPP and the NPA as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. They also intend to re-open old cases, including a case against Congressman Satur Ocampo from 1989. They will pursue cases against members of the political party Bayan Muna, which they consider a front organization for the CPP/NPA. They said the government will not pursue cases against other left-wing organizations that neither espouse violence nor associate with the CPP, such as Akbayan.

15. (C) Asked for evidence of links connecting leftist politicians with the NPA and coup plotting, NICA Director Garcia offered to share all information. "We'll give you a whole stack" of information, some of which was new, he said. Gonzales said the GRP has direct evidence of collusion between the renegade Magdalo Group of soldiers and the NPA, but admitted that other evidence of cooperation between

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military elements and the NPA was indirect. They acknowledged that it was counter-intuitive for anyone in the military to work with NPA members, but maintained it happened in certain cases.

State of National Emergency

16. (C) Cruz and Gonzales said that the sole practical effects of the President's Declaration of a State of Emergency was to enable the government to call out the armed forces to enforce law and order and to act to prevent the media and public utilities from being misused in plots to overthrow the government. They minimized the effects of the police raid on the small newspaper "Daily Tribune," which they said was a propaganda mouthpiece for former President Estrada. A/S Hill cautioned that the Philippines risked gaining a reputation for curtailing media freedoms as long as the Declaration remained in effect. Cruz and Gonzales acknowledged that there had been an energetic debate within the cabinet on whether the government had only given international stature to an insignificant newspaper. Appearing to listen carefully to A/S Hill and Charge's questions on the costs and benefits of the Declaration, they said that the cabinet was reviewing the matter daily.

17. (C) Asked how long the Declaration would be in effect, Cruz and Gonzales said that the economic team advocated lifting it in one week, while the security team preferred to wait up to three or four weeks. In the meantime, they said that the government is holding talks with journalists' unions to encourage them to develop clear standards on what separates sedition from free speech, as well as mechanisms within the journalism profession to enforce them.

Jones